

## Reviews

### Recordings

**Qristina & Quinn Bachand. *Family*.** QQ1002. 2560 Vista Bay Rd., Victoria, B.C. V8P 3E8 (no postal address on packaging); [marie@abachand.ca](mailto:marie@abachand.ca); [www.qbachand.com](http://www.qbachand.com); [www.youtube.com/thebachands](http://www.youtube.com/thebachands)

When I received Qristina and Quinn Bachand's 2011 CD *Family* in the mail, I had never heard of them. Seeing a young guitarist and fiddler on the cover, standing in what appears to be prairie grasses with a big sky in the background, I expected a nice introductory recording from a young group with standard Irish and/or Scottish tunes and some western Canadian pieces. Upon listening to it and viewing their website, it appears I've been living with my head in the sand. This is an extremely well-produced, well-played album, presented in a very professional manner, and their website is – in a word – slick! It turns out that *Family* is their second album after *Relative Minors* (2008) – an obvious reference to their youth. Seemingly still in their teens, this duo have not only already toured Ireland, Scotland, Canada and the U.S., but received accolades from the Canadian Folk Music Awards, the Irish Music Association, and National Public Radio's *Celtic Connections* program, as well as performing with top Canadian fiddlers Ashley MacIsaac and Natalie MacMaster. In this review I risk simply throwing my praise in with the lot.

Before seeing their website or really looking at the liner notes, I sat, listened, and thoroughly enjoyed the album. The tone quality in the violin is consistent and mature; the accompaniment parts are well balanced and detailed, while still bringing out the main fiddle melody. There is a variety of music, from Cape Breton to old-time tunes, and two songs (one of them old-time), but the mainstay of the repertoire is Irish tunes they have learned from sessions and friends. They show mastery in their set selections and flexibility in their arrangements, for example sliding easily from a jig arrangement of "Maids of Mt. Kisco" to the reel in their first track, which effectively raises the energy levels. There is a lift and a lightness to the playing that makes this a wonderful album for both the casual and the attentive listener. The musicianship of the Bachand siblings and their friends has resulted in an album worthy of the acclaim it has received.

If I have any criticism, it is not of what they have done (which is seemingly flawless!) but perhaps of what they haven't. Looking at the CD and their website, it took some time before I read between the lines to learn they are (likely) from Victoria, B.C. I'd love

to know more about their musical community and how they came to Irish music. Although situating themselves as Canadian-born Celtic musicians gives them a broad range of music to draw from, it also leaves them a little placeless. I'm not personally a fan of "Celtic" as a general term to describe such a wide variety of traditions, but it does have its place. In that respect, I think this duo have (so far) missed a bit of an opportunity. The bio states that they have "deep Asturian and Breton roots", but unfortunately they don't pursue this, which leaves their definition of "Celtic" to read as Irish, Scottish and Cape Breton only. They offset the old-time songs, stating that they "stray from their Celtic focus". I certainly hope the Bachands explore their personal roots in the future, as both Brittany and Asturia have some really interesting music; I think they'd find an interesting challenge. Actually writing this review has inspired me to seek out more about Asturian music in particular.

I highly recommend this album, and look forward to their 2014 release, in which I hope they will learn a few Breton and/or Asturian tunes to deepen their Celtic repertoire. Good luck to an exciting new duo on the Canadian scene who have a career ahead of them!

*Evelyn Osborne, St. John's, Newfoundland & Labrador*

**The Bombadils. *Fill Your Boots!*** Luke Fraser, 4399 Rue de Bullion, Montreal, QC H2W 2G2 (no postal address on packaging); [thebombadils@gmail.com](mailto:thebombadils@gmail.com); [www.thebombadils.com](http://www.thebombadils.com)

*Fill your Boots*, the stunning debut album by The Bombadils, is sure to please folk song enthusiasts and Celtic music fans alike with its acoustically ethereal sonorities and its honest portrayal of selected traditional tunes. While staying true to the essence and spirit of the Celtic sound, this young group of musicians have seamlessly incorporated classical, bluegrass and jazz elements into the mix, thereby creating a unique style of their own. Consisting of ten tracks, the album's six original compositions, as well as its unique renditions of one American and three Irish folk tunes, sparkle with an urbane vivaciousness characteristic of music from well-established Celtic fusion bands such as Nickel Creek and the Punch Brothers.

The members of The Bombadils are Sarah Frank (violin, vocals), Anh Phung (flute and Irish whistles), and Luke Fraser (guitar, mandolin and lead vocals), as well as Evan Stewart (bass) and Noam Bierstone

(percussion). Every artist in the band is given the opportunity to shine on this album, but it is flautist Phung's chillingly beautiful improvised passages, which at times soar above the other instruments, that deserves particular attention. An example of this is Track 8, entitled "Rakish Paddy" (coalminers' reel), where the flute and violin perform virtuosic sixteenth-note scalular and repeat note phrases an octave apart; the former playing in an extremely high register with remarkable clarity. The consistency of Phung's technical proficiency is also demonstrated in Track 1, "The Lark in the Morning" (Irish folk tune), which is highlighted by Frank's beautiful vocals. In addition, the "catchy" bass groove performed by Stewart sets the mood for the entire album, in which a strong rhythmic section, at times emphasizing jazz formulaic patterns, is evident in every track.

"Suggestion", the fourth track, demonstrates compositional ingenuity, and is the highlight of the album. The various changes in tempo, the smooth, long phrases of the flute melody against the quick rhythmic jolts of the bass, and the rapid transitions from the various sections emphasize an erratic nature. However, this is the key point of the song, as it is musically humorous in its inconsistency. The eccentric quality of this track emphasizes the musical personae of the artistes, in which they are promoted as "kind-hearted rascals".

The album's artwork further emphasises the sometimes "kooky" quality of the music, as it consists of a pop-up card of a tree growing out of a boot. The colours are vibrant with additional images (which can be interpreted as resembling children's drawings) of the city against a backdrop of a natural setting. The juxtaposition of urban versus rural may be interpreted as representing the various musical influences evident in the songs on the album.

The Bombadils have all the elements of a "great band" – a high level of musical proficiency, deep respect for the traditional roots of their material and an engaging repertoire which holds the attention of the listener from beginning to end. I look forward to seeing what this promising group of artistes will contribute to the Celtic music scene in the near future.

*Amy Gajadhar, Richmond Hill, Ontario*

**La Bottine Souriante.** *Anthologie.* Les Productions Mille-Pattes, 503, rue Archambault, Joliette (Québec), J6E 2W6; [mp@millepattes.com](mailto:mp@millepattes.com); [www.millepattes.com](http://www.millepattes.com)

The 1970s was a period of political and ideological evolution for Quebec. La Bottine Souriante was one of several folk revival groups to emerge from these

politically-charged times, and came to be known as a symbol of Québécois pride and heritage. Superb musicianship, inventive and skilled arrangements and an exuberant, crowd-pleasing live show led to the deserved iconization of this homegrown band. Since 1976, LBS (as the band and fans call them) has made 11 albums. *Anthologie*, released in 2001, coincided with the group's 25th anniversary. The 19-track compilation captures both the steadfast traditional underpinnings and the ongoing innovations that characterized LBS throughout their then 25-year recording history.

La Bottine Souriante self-identifies as a "traditional roots band". Their instrumental repertoire comprises high-energy reels and jigs (or "gigues") born of Quebec's early musical past and influenced by the dance music traditions of France, Ireland, Scotland and England. This is party music, its liveliness powered by driving violin and percussion. In terms of the latter, there are no drum-kits to be found or needed here. Instead, LBS uses time-honored time-keepers that can be found in any household: bones or "os" (usually ribs left over from a meal), spoons or "cuillères", and most stunning – feet or "pieds". The actual sound of foot-tapping, or "podorythmie", as it came to be called, resembles other tap-dance traditions. However, in the case of traditional Québécois music, it is performed sitting, and often while playing another instrument. Other instruments employed by LBS are the button accordion, which garnered popularity in Quebec at the end of the 19th Century, and six-string guitar – a later incarnation of four-course and five-course Baroque guitars, known in Quebec since the 17th century. Mandolin, flageolet, and "guimbarde" (which is translated in the liner notes as "Jew's harp") round out LBS's rootsy sound.

Although LBS seeks to revive ancestral tunes ("Reel de Jos Cormier", "Mon Père Mariez Moi-Donc" and "Les Patins de Pauline" are examples), their arrangements nonetheless are novel, fleshing out the songs' rudimental starkness and providing superbly-executed cross-rhythms that pull against the duple-metre violin and foot-tapping undercurrents. The ongoing addition and subtraction of instruments within arrangements creates compelling shape-shifting musical landscapes.

Throughout their long career, La Bottine Souriante's personnel continued to flux. The most radical reinvention of the group occurred in 1988, when four horns, synthesizer, and electric bass were added. Not everyone in LBS's fan base were charmed by the group's modern turn. However, even though the band's new arrangements of traditional music now borrowed from jazz, rock, blues and samba, fiddle

and foot-tapping continued to provide the foundation to the majority of their repertoire.

Seven of *Anthologie's* 19 tracks are instrumental; the remaining 12 are songs. English translations provided in the liner notes are helpful to listeners who learned their French abroad and lack ears refined enough to catch the diction, cadence and dialect of Québécois French.

Although La Bottine Souriante is strictly a French-language group, it was a good move on their part to translate for and endear themselves to English fans, allowing Anglos to connect with Quebec's cultural revival. The songs on *Anthologie* are so compelling that one begins to sing along phonetically to join in the fun, and the experience is that much richer for knowing what the songs are about. The ribaldry that is part of the Québécois cultural equation comes across in "Mon Père Mariez Moi-Donc", in which a young bride complains to the husband, who falls asleep on their wedding night, "Tu n'as pas fait ton devoir" ("You didn't do your duty"). In "Yoyo", a monk parties with three women in a confessional, drinking wine and "...tiens! tiens! tiens!" (the French equivalent of "ya-da-ya-da-ya-da").<sup>1</sup> Having been raised Roman Catholic, I found this track delightfully irreverent.

That having been said, I was moved most by the track entitled "2033". This is an LBS original – a cautionary tale that warns about the future ruination of our land. This call-and-response song is simple and stark, conveyed by unaccompanied voices eerily reminiscent of Gregorian chant. In the story, a hunter returns to the goose hunt at Dupras Island. Instead of finding geese, he encounters strewn Coca-Cola cans and gun shells stamped "Made in U.S.A.". The sound of the lead singer's voice on this track reminds me of priests at Latin Mass. It's a pity we don't know who he is; personnel isn't attributed to each track of *Anthologie*. Instead, there is an ambiguous chart in the liner notes that chronicles the various personnel from 1976 to 2001, without being clear as to who actually played what on each track. The compelling lead singer on "2033" also appears on Track 2. Other solo voices on *Anthologie* aren't nearly as provocative.

Track 2 ("Le P'tit Porte-Clé") and track 6 ("Pinci-Pincette") are traditional call-and-response songs, but instead of being plaintive, as is "2033", they are driving and hypnotic. They seem likely to be derivative of songs developed by voyageurs – the woods-runners and fur traders of early Canada who traveled by canoe west of the Ottawa River. According to an account of folk song and music in Quebec by Stephen Winick, voyageurs spent most of their time paddling or portaging. To pass the time and to ensure the coordination of the paddlers, they adapted traditional

songs into work songs. "Le P'tit Porte-Clé" is particularly fun to sing, because it's a cumulative counting song, the variety of which makes for fun road trips and evenings around the campfire.

*Anthologie* concludes with an original composition by band member Andre Marchand: "La Valse des Belugas" ("Waltz of the Belugas").<sup>2</sup> "La Valse" is slow-moving, poignant and beautiful. Expert execution of dynamics on mandolin and guitar dreamily evoke the constant motion of rolling waves. An accordion joins in halfway through the piece, sounding like so many bubbles effervescing on an eddying sea. I poured blue bubble bath into my tub and submerged myself to get the full effect. Lovely! Right up to the closing sound – a whale's plaintive farewell.

Rita di Ghent, Toronto, Ontario

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is for all you Seinfeld fans.

<sup>2</sup> The Beluga is a small white whale. Two of seven of Canada's populations are endangered.

**Steve Goodchild. *Nooks & Crannies*.** 58 Springborough Green SW, Calgary, Alta. T3H 5M5 (no postal address on packaging); [sjgincalgary@gmail.com](mailto:sjgincalgary@gmail.com)

Singer and songwriter Steve Goodchild is a self-taught multi-instrumentalist from Calgary with a wide range of instruments at his disposal, including: 6-, 9-, 12-string, bass, tenor & baritone guitars, dobro, mandolin, mandola and mandocello, bouzouki, cittern, banjo and Appalachian dulcimer. Goodchild is known as a "jack-of-all strings" and has a distinct repertoire that encompasses a variety of styles, as portrayed in his debut solo CD, *Nooks & Crannies*. The variety of

instrumentation gives this CD diverse appeal. For the reader who is also a “gearhead”, Goodchild uses: Martin 00-18 (tuned E B E G# B E), M-38 and D-45 guitars, Lowden 12-string guitar, Alvarez-Yairi and Taylor 8-string Baritone guitars; Trinity River acoustic bass guitar; Oakwood Bouzar; Rigel and Neil Sergeant mandolins; 1930s vintage dobro; Appalachian dulcimer; old-time open-back banjo; and Lloyd’s vintage Hohner accordian. With this assortment of instrumentation, Goodchild offers a new and fresh sound on every track.

This album is comprised of 11 tracks with a common theme: the “nooks and crannies” of the singer’s mind. The track order takes the listener through a chronological story of Goodchild’s life. As the tracks progress, suspense slowly builds to a climax with “Jenny’s Song”, which reflects on Goodchild’s feelings about his grandmother. In fact, many of the tracks focus on grandmother Jenny, who often used the expression “I’ve looked in every nook and cranny...”. “Jenny’s Song” is by far my favourite, as it uses a variety of instruments, including guitar, baritone guitar, acoustic bass, mandolin and accordian, all played by Goodchild. The lyrics shares a sense of longing for his grandmother, and the liner notes provide an excellent history of the life of Jenny Turley and her relation to the artist.

This “life story” then gradually draws to a conclusion with the final track, “There’s a Hole in the Heart of Texas Tonight”. Although not the end of Goodchild’s life story, this track depicts the end of an important chapter in his life, with the song illustrating the passing of Lucy Nell Andrews, host of his favorite house concert series, where he performed very frequently. I would love to know more about this tune. As a Canadian singer and songwriter, what is the author’s relationship to Texas? There must be a story here, especially since the album was also produced there.

Overall, the liner notes are well done, with each track clearly explained and the lyrics provided. The lyrics tend not to depart far from the “life story” theme; they add a consistency to the CD, but this at times can also feel repetitive.

The cover art for Goodchild’s album shows an old attic with rusted chains, old chandeliers and dusty ceiling fans. It looks like somewhere one might be on the lookout – in all the nooks and crannies – for lost treasures from the past. The album art works well with the title and underlying theme of the album.

Overall, *Nooks & Crannies* is a worthy album of the Canadian country folk scene. It engages the listener, and takes you on a personal journey through the life of Steve Goodchild.

*Kiran Morarji, Toronto, Ontario*

**James Gordon. *Coyote’s Calling*.** BCD223. Borealis Records, 290 Shuter St., Toronto, Ont. M6R 2B2; [www.borealisrecords.com](http://www.borealisrecords.com); [info@borealisrecords.com](mailto:info@borealisrecords.com); Linus Entertainment / True North Records, Unit 14, 3245 Harvester Rd., Burlington, Ont. L7N 3T7; [truenorthrecords.com](http://truenorthrecords.com); [linusentertainment.com](http://linusentertainment.com)

**James Gordon. *My Stars Your Eyes*.** BCD200. Borealis Records (addresses above)

James Gordon’s *My Stars Your Eyes* (2009) and *Coyote’s Calling* (2013) clearly demonstrate this singer-songwriter’s 30-year career and experience in the music industry. His skillful guitar stylings include tracks that feature both plucked and strummed patterns and attest to his talents as a musician and guitarist. In addition, his ability to write mini-stories and personify them through music also demonstrates his outstanding abilities as a singer-songwriter. Both albums are expertly produced and recorded, providing listeners with clear and crisp tracks where both his voice and his instrumentation are clearly audible.

*My Stars Your Eyes* features 12 original tracks that can be subdivided into five themes. There are six tracks about love and relationships, one about astronomy, three about the environment, one about folk stories and two about travel.

Similarly, *Coyote’s Calling*, Gordon’s sixth album for Borealis Records, has 12 tracks. Eleven of these tracks are original songs written by James Gordon and one is a co-write with Katherine Wheatley. These tracks can also be divided into themes: five about social justice, three about travel, another five about the environment and one functioning as a tribute to Jack Layton.

Both albums feature a variety of instrumentation, some of it quite unusual. For example, *My Stars Your Eyes* includes the usual roundup of instruments such as guitars (bass and electric), banjo and harmonica, but also among the unusual instruments are an organ, mandolin, sousaphone and recorder. *Coyote’s Calling* also features a balanced arrangement of instruments, including an accordion, banjo, lap steel and ukulele.

If you are a longtime fan of James Gordon, or an avid folk music connoisseur, neither album will disappoint. Any new listeners to the folk or singer-songwriter genre will appreciate both albums and Gordon’s storytelling abilities. His capacity to capture treasured moments and experiences of everyday life in a narrative and sometimes witty form attests to his talent as a songwriter. His commentaries on the state of our world and its problems, including environmental issues, are reflected and resonate with the listener because his to-the-point observations are what we all see but sometimes fear to discuss.

Being a new listener to James Gordon myself, I am astounded that he has released over 35 albums, both with the legendary folk group Tamarack and as a solo act. The musical diversity he brings to each album validates his strength as a musician.

Both albums also feature informative liner notes that foreground his lyrics and include explanations and the inspirations behind each song. For example, “Jack’s Dream” from *Coyote’s Calling* recounts words from Jack Layton’s last letter to Canadians before his death. It provides a vision of hope to listeners and acts as a tribute to a longtime friend, mentor and collaborator.

My favourite track, “The Great Duncan Heist” from *My Stars Your Eyes*, is based on a true story. While performing in Duncan, B.C., Gordon’s CDs were stolen during a concert; instead of going to the police, he wrote a comical song about the experience that would make anyone a fan of his music, including me. His inclusion of truthful and somewhat harsh views about folk music make this song satirical and very witty. This track is a waltz, and features banjo, sousaphone and accordion. In addition, Gordon uses inflection and intonation in his vocals to mimic his storyline. This reminded me of my when my parents imitated characters in books they read to me as a child.

Both albums feature watercolour artwork by Tanya Williams. Her artwork provides the perfect backdrop to Gordon’s storytelling songs.

For more information about James Gordon, his albums and tour dates, please visit his website: [www.jamesgordon.ca](http://www.jamesgordon.ca)

Raj S. Singh, Brampton, Ontario

**Saint Alvia. *Static Psalms*. Dvrgnt 270164.** Diocese of the Church of Saint Alvia, c/o Divergent Recordings, 14 – 3245 Harvester Rd., Burkington, Ont. L7R 3T7; [marketing@dvrgnt.con](mailto:marketing@dvrgnt.con); [www.saintalvia.com](http://www.saintalvia.com)

Saint Alvia is a six-piece Canadian band hailing from Burlington, Ontario. The band name references Ernest Alvia Smith, who was Canada’s last living recipient of the Victoria Cross for valor in WWII. The two-time Juno nominees released their third LP, *Static Psalms*, in 2012. This 13-track album was co-produced by one of the founding members, Greg Tayler, and famed producer Greig Nori (Sum 41, Treble Charger, Iggy Pop, and Hedley).

The CD presents a classic case of “don’t judge a book by its cover”, as it was the cover art that really got me confused. It displays an antique leather book jacket inscribed with an archaic-looking font and scratched tally marks. With song titles like “When I

Die”, “Whispering to the Dead”, and “Mary Shelly”, I had the impression that the album would feature sombre melodies with highly distorted, down-tuned guitars, growling vocals and symphonic orchestrations. However, *Static Psalms* – the “Gospel according to Saint Alvia” – is far away from such gloomy musical aesthetic, and presents a rather uplifting and at times cheerful soundscape. The band describe themselves as genre-bending punks. The use of the term “punk” in this case expands from the original meaning, tied to the “no future” philosophy and dirty sound with a DIY ethic, to a more polished, high-quality production.

The band’s music presents a wide-ranging combination of styles, and includes a mix of rock, pop, country, blues, ska, reggae and punk. The album ranges from slightly heavier alternative rock, such as “Whispering to the Dead”, melodious songs like “Define Me” with a combination of blues rock, rock ‘n’ roll and a style reminiscent of The Offspring, to such tracks as “Not Our Word”, which recalls a pop ballad. Nevertheless, most of the songs contain singable and catchy melodies, and I could see how some of the material might be fun to experience live. Songs like “When I Die” can easily invite the audience to raise a few rounds and participate in singalongs; while the track “Whisky Business” evokes an atmosphere of an episode set in a Western saloon. Although in certain cases it seemed odd to me that lightweight and upbeat melodies were accompanied by such titles as “Murder in the Motel”, such decisions are clarified through the lyrical content of the songs (for example, this song title was taken from the headline of a newspaper).

Overall, the album might be a good listen for an audience member who is not particularly familiar with alternative music, but it probably won’t please a diehard devotee of punk rock or other heavier genres. *Static Psalms* calls for an open-minded listener to experience the band’s eclectic musical explorations.

Ekaterina Pyatkova, Toronto, Ontario



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